



Rep. Cary Condotta

PO Box 40600
414 John L. O'Brien Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Phone: (360) 786-7954

E-mail:

condotta_ca@leg.wa.gov

Web page:

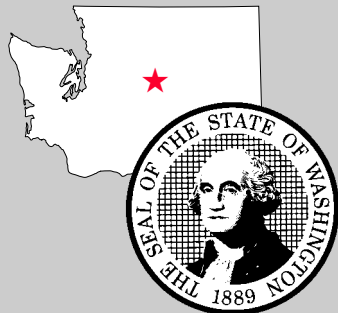
<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/condotta.htm>

District office:

3012 Ste. D
G.S. Center Road
Wenatchee, WA 98801
(509) 664-1274

Toll-free hotline:

1-800-562-6000
1-800-635-9993 (hearing
impaired)



Rep. Cary Condotta

12th Legislative District

2004 Session Highlights

May 2004

Dear Friends,

The 2004 legislative session has wound down, but the momentum is winding up. There is much discussion of the progress made this year, but even more about our state's **prospects for the future**. You'll find both discussed in this newsletter.

The past couple sessions were very unique, not only for those of us who are new to the Legislature, but to those who have served for some time. With a Democrat majority in the House of Representatives and Republican majority in the Senate, the stage was set for further stalemate – despite facing the most demanding budget and policy issues in years. And yet last session the Legislature was able to reach agreement on a tough budget and important policy issues.

That carried over into this year's supplemental budget and short session year. A new balance occurred and progress overcame politics. We created a balanced budget, addressed key policies and, in the end, averted a budget disaster and built foundation for future progress. Not bad, considering the situation at hand.

While we still have not resolved many issues, we are closer to success than failure. Inside this newsletter we will take a closer look at what we accomplished and, more importantly, what we can achieve in the near future.

It has been an absolute honor to be a member of this new generation of legislators who are not afraid to break down barriers and move forward. I thank you for your input and support in a most challenging environment. I have learned a great deal and I am looking forward to sharing my enthusiasm with you as I travel the entire 12th District in the next few months.

Sincerely,

A red ink handwritten signature of Cary Condotta.

Cary Condotta
State Representative

Priorities Addressed in 2004

Budgets

The Operating Budget: Prioritizing Washington's needs

Last year the Legislature closed a \$2.7 billion budget hole without raising taxes by putting our most pressing needs first. This year Senate Republicans introduced a supplemental budget that followed the same principle of **prioritizing needs based on the state's current amount of revenue**.

While House Democrats proposed higher spending levels and a smaller reserve, we reached a compromise and funded many of our highest priorities, including caring for citizens in nursing homes, kids on Medicaid and those with developmental disabilities. We also added nearly 3,000 enrollment slots to our colleges and universities and left a reasonable amount in the state's reserves.

Other states have called Washington's "Priorities of Government" approach one of the most creative and innovative in the U.S., and are looking to us as a model for how to solve budget problems without increasing taxes, especially in a slower economy.

The Capital Budget: Building what we need

This year's supplemental capital budget took on new projects that required new spending. Although many of us questioned this idea, it's true many of the projects — such as improvements at our small community colleges — were long overdue. While the 12th District was left out of the first supplemental capital budget draft, the final version included much-needed funding for two projects at Wenatchee Valley College: the **Wenatchee Higher Education Center** (\$1.5 million) and **Anderson Hall** (\$1.6 million). This college is a major asset to

our district, but one tour through the facility shows the dire need for capital improvements. All three 12th District legislators put on the full court press to make sure these W.V.C. projects made it into the final budget. Mission accomplished!

The Transportation Budget: Getting around our district

While last year's gas tax increase caused some controversy, it turned out to be the project list that dominated the debate in our district. This year we came up with some possible adjustments to that list in the House budget, but the Senate would not concur. In the end, we reduced funding for the **"Big Y" project** coming off Blewett Pass (\$16.5 million) and added phase one of the **SR28/east end of the George Sellar Bridge** (\$9 million). This debate will continue into the next session and there may still be time to examine our priorities and possible options.

Washington's Business Climate

While we made only limited improvements to Washington's business climate this year, the dialogue has changed considerably. Many groups have documented and acknowledged that Washington is far from competitive when it comes to business issues. Just look at the concessions — from taxes to regulations — we made to keep Boeing from moving to another state. While it is my impression we went too far for Boeing, company executives informed me we *still* only ranked in the middle of the pack in relation to other states. It will take major changes — such as legislation I introduced this year to revamp the Labor and Industries Department — to **make Washington truly**

competitive. While 10 workers' compensation reform bills were introduced, only one made it through.

This session we also debated a bill that would have banned overseas contracts for state projects. In the end, we determined that enacting such a ban would likely cause those contracts to go to other states rather than stay in Washington, defeating the entire argument for protection of jobs. It would also have had a major, negative effect on our exports and hurt companies in Central Washington. Three measures that would have addressed this issue were defeated. The search for a more positive approach continues.

Education

This year the Legislature tackled issues from the WASL to charter schools. However, the major issue for education (both K-12 and higher ed) still revolves around funding. This year I joined members from both sides of the aisle to support legislation to **study looking at new ways to fund education**. There was little, if any, support for a sales tax increase. We will be working together to find a more consistent, predictable method of funding education.

Health Care

Tort reform was a major focus in this short session, although the Legislature, unfortunately, did not reach consensus. In terms of health care, possibly the best idea came not from the state level, but from the federal level with the introduction of **Health Savings Accounts** (HSAs). This is a very exciting option for individuals and small business groups. This year I introduced legislation to make this option available for state employees. Although it didn't pass, the issue is now on the table and I will continue to support this important health care breakthrough.

Locally Important Issues

The 2004 legislative session was very positive for the people of Central Washington. Here are a few of the bills we passed that will help local communities:

- We worked from start to finish on legislation I co-sponsored that will provide aluminum companies — including Alcoa — with **temporary tax relief**. Thanks to early efforts from all parties, this job-protection legislation is now law and **Alcoa** is one step closer to restarting.
- We reached a last minute agreement on **cholinesterase testing for farm workers**. The bill we passed will require L&I to pay for costs associated with this very controversial program and insist the agency compile results we'll use to determine whether we even need further testing.
- At the request of county commissioners, we went after restrictions on burning **local orchards**. I introduced a House bill to fix the problem, and the Legislature passed a Senate bill that included the correct language from my original bill.

Other Positive Steps in 2004

Here are some additional important issues we addressed this year:

- After much debate, we passed a bill to **curb fraud in the workers' compensation system**. Although this is only one of ten reforms proposed, it should reduce the cost of the system.
- This year I continued to support broader use of the **"Priorities of Government"** idea, including a bill I sponsored this year to require L&I to use this approach in budgeting and service delivery. I also support using this approach with other agencies and in higher education.
- This year I supported a bill that moves community colleges and 4-year institutions toward **common course numbers** and makes it **easier to transfer** between institutions. I also supported legislation to look at why we are seeing more **remedial courses** at our colleges, which reduces funding and the availability of core programs.



Rep. Condotta served as one of the lead negotiators for House Republicans on the House Commerce & Labor Committee. He also serves on the Higher Education and Trade & Economic Development Committees.

Representative
Cary Condotta
12th Legislative District

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What's on the table for next year?

There were several important issues left on the table this year – issues the Legislature should take up again next year. They include:

- Making **changes to Washington's workers' compensation system**, including simplifying rate calculations and reducing costs and premiums.
- **Limiting state agencies' rule-making authority** and placing the burden of proof on the agency's shoulders, not the employers'.
- Passing reforms proven to **control liability insurance costs** and slow skyrocketing medical malpractice rates that are forcing doctors to close their practices.
- Authorizing **affordable insurance plans** for small employers.
- Giving state employees the option of using **health savings accounts to manage medical expenses**.

I will continue to drive the Commerce & Labor Committee to improve the business and economic conditions in our state. A healthy economy will provide more than adequate revenue without tax increases. Education funding and local issues, including an increased emphasis on tourism, will also be addressed.

District office reopens

Now that the 2004 legislative session is over, I've reopened the local office here in the 12th District. Kurt Hammond, my legislative assistant, and I are available here to help you. I invite you to drop by at **3012 G.S. Center Road, Suite D, Wenatchee** or give us a call at **(509) 664-1274**. You can also reach me by e-mail at **condotta_ca@leg.wa.gov**, or by calling the Legislative Hotline at **1-800-562-6000**.

It's very important to me that I'm accessible to you. I encourage you to **stop by or call** if you have questions, if you want to talk about legislative issues or need help working with a state agency.

I am also always happy to **come to your town** if you have a group or organization that wishes to meet with me. Provide a few weeks notice if possible and I would certainly get you on my calendar. **Look for me all around the 12th District** in the next few months to discuss issues facing our state and to get your input.

Representative **Cary Condotta** 12th District

Inside:

- Priorities addressed in 2004
- Locally important issues
- Other steps taken in 2004
- On the table for next year
- District office reopens

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